

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta pedagogická**

**Bakalářská práce**  
**LIBERÁLNÍ DEMOKRATÉ - HISTORIE,**  
**MOC A PLÁNY**

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**Plzeň 2013**

**University of West Bohemia**

**Faculty of Education**

**Undergraduate Thesis**

**THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS - HISTORY,  
POWER AND PLANS**

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**Plzeň 2013**

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V Plzni dne 28. června 2013

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank the supervisor of my undergraduate thesis, Bc. Et Mgr. Andrew Tollet, M.Litt., for his help, patience and guidance with my work. Furthermore, I am also grateful to Peter Lesniak, officer of the Liberal Democrats, for his help and advice and the Liberal Democrats Historical group, namely to Graham Lipplatt.

## ABSTRACT

Adam Vlček. University of West Bohemia. June, 2013. Liberal Democrats - History, power and plans, Supervisor: Bc. et Mgr. Andrew Tollet, M. Litt.

The aim of this thesis is to describe the development of the Liberal Democrat Party. It follows the development of the party since the Liberal Party in the 19th century, its peaks and falls, the alliance with the Social Democratic Party and subsequent merge. The second part of the thesis is focused on the current face of the party. It describes a structure of the party, its organs, rules and system. It also describes the last general election in 2010 and the subsequent coalition government. The third part of the thesis follows the power of the party and its development - from no power at the beginning of the LibDems to the current coalition. It also describes important laws in which the Liberal Democrats have participated and the power of the party in districts. The last section is about the future of the party.

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## 1 Introduction

The Liberal Democrats is a political party founded in 1988, by the merging of two political parties – the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party. The Liberal Democrats are the third largest party in the United Kingdom with 23% of the vote in the last general election in 2010. The present leader, Nick Clegg, was elected in 2007 and led the party to a coalition government with the Conservative Party. Clegg became Deputy Prime Minister and several other Democrats took up ministerial positions.

The Headquarters of the Liberal Democrats is at 8 - 10 Great George Street, London and the number of members in January 2013 was 42 501, which is the lowest number in the last 13 years. The political position of the Liberal Democrats is described as being from radical centre to centre left, which means that they support liberalism, which Kimlicka (1989) describes as “a theory about the proper relationship between the individual and the state. But liberalism also contains a broader account of the relationship between the individual and society” (back cover). Another point of their interest is support of progressive taxation.

The previous Liberal and Social Democratic parties had been cooperating for seven years before they merged. Both parties had an absolutely different past - the Liberal Party was old and well-established in the United Kingdom in 1859; on the other hand the Social Democratic Party was founded in 1981 by four Labour party members:

*Labour's shift to the left and the subsequent constitutional changes were also a major factor in the breakaway of the Social Democratic Party. With a combination of a constitutional changes and leftward drift of policy, certain members of the Party believed that they could no longer remain within its folds. Immediately following the 1981 Wembley conference, David Owen, Shirley Williams, William Rogers and Roy Jenkins made their*



*'Limehouse Declaration' saying that 'the need for realignment in British politics must be faced' and this rapidly led to the formation of a new party. (Smith, Spears, 1992, p. 6).*

The most important ideas of the Liberal Democrats include changing the minimum wage, more freedom to school management in state-funded schools, voting rights from 16, bill of paying taxes for all MP's, Lords and parliamentary candidates, or making prisoners work. During their existence, the Liberal Democrats have created many laws, the most important of which have been the freeze of fuel duty, an income tax cut on the first £9,440 earned for everybody, extra money for schools (over 2.5 billions pounds more) or the "triple lock" on pensions which assures pensioners an extra £650 every year.

## 2. History of the party

### 2.1 The Liberal Party

The Liberal Party is a party set up in 1859. The origin of the Liberal party was in the Whigs:

*They formerly were called Whigs from Whiggamores, a name given to the Scots in the South-west, who for want of corn in that quarter, used annually to repair to Leith, to buy stores that came from the North, and all that drove were called Whiggamors, or Whiggs, from the term Whiggam, which they used in driving their horses (Tegg, 1877, p. 213).*

The Whigs were a political party set up in 1678 and at the beginning participating in the Parliament in Scotland. Over the years Whigs spread into the Parliament of England or the Parliament of the United Kingdom. From the 1830s to 1860s there were many new political parties in the United Kingdom. The reason was the spreading of a franchise and political parties wanted common people to participate to get their support (e.g. The Conservative Party was set up in 1835).

In the earlier days of its existence the party was not so important as today. Much more important was a strong personality, so in the 19th century there were many political parties with the same or different ideologies. It was needed to create one strong party, easily to join several small.

*With Lord John Russell and Lord Palmerston competing for the parliamentary support required to become Prime Minister. The glue to bind the two leaders and their various factions together was provided by the Peelites, a small but influential band of former Conservatives (including William Gladstone), who had broken with their previous party in 1846 over the repeal of the Corn Laws (import duties on grain), because of their ideological support for free trade. (www.liberalhistory.org.uk).*

This led to the forming of the Liberal Party on 6 June 1859, when Whigs, Peelites and Radicals met in London's St. James Street, overthrew the Conservative government and became the strongest party for most of the next 30 years.

The Liberals had a strong and widespread base and they profited from the next franchises in 1867 and 1885. William E. Gladstone came out as a winner from disputes of the leading position in the party at the beginning and became a strong leader of the Liberal Party. He, as leader, achieved a huge victory in the 1868 election and formed the first Liberal government. Gladstone was overall prime minister four times - 1868-1874, 1880-1885 (second won election mainly thanks to support of minorities abroad, especially in the Balkans), 1886 (Gladstone won election but after an unsuccessful attempt to fix the troubles in Ireland, he split up the party and was dismissed) and 1892-1894 (he was just head of the minority administration).

After a dispute within the party, the Liberals lost power for the next 20 years (apart from the administration in 1892-1894). The problem was Gladstone's successor.

*... his replacement, Lord Rosebery, proved to be a weak leader with no clear sense of direction. The party was split over social policy, between those more traditional Liberals who thought the government should keep out of economic affairs, and those who argued that state intervention was necessary to relieve poverty, unemployment and ill-health and thereby guarantee true liberty (www.liberalhistory.org.uk).*

As the Conservative party took advantage of bad Gladstone's successor, the Liberal party did the same after the Conservative leader Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (3rd Marquess of Salisbury) retired. To get as many possible anti-Conservative's voters the Liberal party made an electoral pact with the newly established Labour party and gave a birth to the new liberalism. The move was successful and the Liberals came to power between 1906 and 1915 under prime ministers Campbell-

Bannerman and Asquith. But the second election in 1910 was not happy for the Liberals: they won the election but could form the government only with the support of Labour and Irish Nationalist parties. However during this electoral term (1910-1915) the Liberal party was getting stronger and pointed to win the next election and form a government by itself easily.

The balance of power was hardly changed because of the upcoming world war. Most Liberals agreed with a declaration of war, especially because of Germany's unprovoked offensive against Belgium. Bad developments for Britain in the war meant a change of prime minister: Herbert Henry Asquith was replaced in December 1916 by Lloyd George, also a Liberal. However Lloyd George was more supported by the Conservatives than his own party. This led to a split of the Liberals, which became quite obvious in the 1918 election: Lloyd George's faction won and Asquith with his supporters suffered a huge loss and was not even in opposition. Lloyd George was prime minister till 1922 and is known as a very energetic prime minister who brought Britain to victory over Germany in the war. Lloyd George was very popular and removed Asquith away from the Liberal Party. Lloyd George became official leader of the Liberal Party in 1926 and continued in this post until 1931. He remains the only Welsh prime minister and the only one who had English as a second language (his first was Welsh). He has been also ranked in top positions in many popularity rankings among British prime ministers; second in the BBC Radio Poll in 1999, third in British Politics Group Poll in 2000 and he also was in sixth position in prime ministers in average scholar rank created by the University of Leeds in 2004. The creation of two Liberal camps meant the disunity of the Liberal party. Just 9 years after a great victory, 1924 election was a disaster and the Liberals found themselves at the edge of the British political scene. The subsequent return of Lloyd George was just an unsuccessful call for help and did not help at all. From these days, the Conservatives and the Labour party have been alternating in the winning of general elections.

## 2. 2 Social Democratic party

The existence of the Social Democratic Party lasted only seven years. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) was founded in 1981 by a so-called “Gang of Four” – Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams, who were members of the Labour party (Owen and Rodgers were MPs; Williams had lost her seat in the 1979 election and Jenkins left Parliament in 1977 to become a President of the European Commission); however, they disagreed with party policy and its becoming more left-wing than centrist. The SDP was founded on 26 March 1981 at a press conference after settling its policy, nowadays known as the Limehouse Declaration, which Havighurst (1985) described as follows:

*The Limehouse Declaration declared that the launching of a new party represented the biggest break in the pattern of British politics for at least 60 years. The first task of the new party, therefore, was breaking the mold - Britain needs a reformed and liberated political system without the pointless conflict, the dogma, the violent lurches of policy and the class antagonisms that the two old parties have fostered. Specific tasks included proportional representations in the Commons, a mixed economy with control shared by management and trade unions, an investment program based on oil revenue decentralization of government, reform of the House of Lords, improved health and welfare services, care for the environment, more equality for women, no racial discrimination, continued membership in the European Community, and multilateral disarmament. (p. 600).*

Although it might seem that the SDP was an offshoot of the Labour party, in 1981 60% of its members were without previous political affiliation, 25% had deserted from Labour, 10% from the Conservatives and 5% from the Liberal party. The Gang of Four fought against each other to obtain positions in the party: Jenkins defeated Owen and became the first leader of the SDP and Williams

defeated Rogers to become SDP president. The Social Democratic Party had a great entry to the politics and just in 1981 created the SDP-Liberal Alliance and started to develop in electing prospecting.

At the beginning, both parties supported each other in regions where one or the other was stronger, such as Roy Jenkins was supported in the first SDP election by the Liberals in Warrington, 1981. During the summer 1981 the alliance was settled. The British political situation was inconstant by that time. The Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher, was unpopular because Britain was in a deep economic crisis. On the other hand the Labour Party had a new leader Michael Foot and started to shift to the left. So the alliance had ambitions to achieve voters from both wings.

In 1982 it seemed to be the favourite in an upcoming elections but the Falklands war changed its situation, similar to events in 1914 and the Liberal party. Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives jumped from third to first position in the pre-election survey. In the 1983 general election the SDP-Liberal Alliance finished third with 25% of the vote, right behind the Labour party (28%) and the victorious Conservatives (44%). The Alliance won 23 seats out of 650, 6 of the SDP. This unsatisfactory result led to Roy Jenkins resigning and an accession of his follower Dawid Owen in June 1983. Owen seemed to be a distinctive and strong leader and the SDP increased its seats from 6 to 8 thanks to the electing of Mike Hancock (1984) and Rosie Barnes (1987). However the progress of the SDP-Liberal Alliance was affected by two different politics and drifts in several topics, such as nuclear weapons or privatisation. It was approaching the inevitable.

## 2.3 Early days of the Liberal Democrats

If the SDP-Liberal Alliance wanted to achieve greater success in elections, they had to join forces and influence people as a whole. The winter of 1987-1988 was a negotiating period between both sides. They argued about the name or the official constitution. In the end, the merge was agreed by most members in both camps and on 3 March 1988 the Social and Liberal Democrats (SLD) were officially announced. The first leader, Paddy Ashdown (a former Liberal party member), was elected in June 1988 as well as Roy Jenkins as head of the SLD in the House of Lords. The name Social and Liberal Democrats was not popular and so the party decided in October 1989 to change it to the Liberal Democrats, known as the LibDems. They also chose the Bird of Liberty (appendix No. 1) as their logo; nowadays it is a symbol of the party and has even its own Facebook profile.

The hard first years, when the party was losing its position and power, especially because of the continually persisting two ideologies of SDP and Liberals, was changed in 1990 by-elections with victories in Eastbourne, followed by Ribble Valley and Kincardine & Deeside in 1991. In the 1992 general election the LibDems reached almost 18% which meant 20 seats in Government. This rising popularity was attributed to the leader Paddy Ashdown.

*Paddy Ashdown was consistently described in opinion polls as the most popular party leader and the party's policies, especially its pledge to raise income tax to invest extra resources in education, were widely praised. (www.liberalhistory.org.uk).*

Ashdown wanted to take advantage of his popularity and from 1993 he started to secretly negotiate with Tony Blair about a coalition with the “New Labour” party.

## 2. 4 Increase of the LibDems

In the 1994 European Election the LibDems won two seats in the European Parliament. It meant the first bigger step forward and a change for the better. Ashdown wanted to improve the growing power of the Liberal Democrats and create some government coalition after the 1997 general election. Before the election Ashdown proved, based on previous multiyear negotiating, a coalition with Tony Blair's Labour party; however, this so called Lib-Lab pact was useless because Labour achieved majority winner. What more, "Labour's landslide victory of May 1997 saw the election of a record number of Labour MPs in the biggest electoral swing for 50 years". (Thomas, 2005, p. 118)

Ashdown retired from his position in August 1999 and was replaced by Charles Kennedy who was a former member of the SDP. Kennedy was a strong leader and was leading the party to its aim – to become a strong opposition. In the 2001 general election the LibDems reached over 18% and 52 seats and in 2005 it was even better.

*The results indeed provided grounds for celebration. The Liberal Democrats emerged from the contest with 62 seats, the highest number of Liberal MPs since 1923, and 22.7 per cent of the vote, a 4 per cent increase from 2001. (www.liberalhistory.org.uk.)*

Kennedy had several affairs, the biggest with alcohol. After years of denial, on 5 January 2006 he admitted his long-time problems with alcoholism and under the pressure of discontent in the party he announced new leadership election. Kennedy wanted to win again but he was defeated by Sir Menzies Campbell.

The Liberal Party was widely spread and popular at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. However both world wars did not help the party. After the second world war, which was worse than the first, the party was on the brink of extinction. It took over 50 years to recover. In the new



century, 21st century, the Liberals looked to be back in new form and wanted to change their well-known third position in Britain. The growing power of the party was reflected in by-elections in 2006: the LibDems were without an official leader between January and March, yet still won in Dunfermline and West Fife ahead of the Labour. Party needed to achieve more support in upcoming general election in 2010. So Campbell announced the LibDems bill to reduce income tax from 20 to 16%, the lowest rate since 1916.

Despite all his efforts Menzies was not a strong and reputable leader and the party, after great success in the previous elections, started to lose support. In October 2007 Campbell decided to resign and the LibDems were again leaderless. It took two months to vote in Nick Clegg in the closest party election - he defeated Chris Huhne, who had also lost against Campbell a year previously, only by 1.2 %. Clegg is the fourth party leader and the most successful so far. He led the LibDems in the 2010 general election in the hope of achieving power through some coalition. Thanks to the Liberal Democrats centre position in policy they are able to negotiate and co-operate with either the Conservatives or the Labour party. The 2010 general election was both successful and unsuccessful. The party lost five seats but on the other hand they reached 23% (0.9% more) than in the previous 2005 general election and all above they were able to create a coalition with the victorious Conservatives and complete their wishes about returning to power. Negotiating with the Conservatives was successful - Clegg became Deputy Prime Minister and three-quarters of the LibDem Manifesto was included in the Government programme as well.

There is something to point out. Clegg, at the beginning of his leadership, had to talk about his heroes from the past and inspiring persons. He mentioned Harry Willcock and Václav Havel. Willcock was Liberal party member and become known because of refusing to show his ID card. It was on 7 December 1950 when he was stopped when he was driving in Finchley and asked to show his ID card. He answered "*I am a Liberal and I am against this sort of thing*" and was punished by

a ten shillings penalty. Clegg admired Havel, former Czech and Czechoslovakian president, for his dedicated desire to help his country and literally said:

*His leadership of the Charter 77 manifesto group and then the Velvet Revolution was an inspiration to people of my generation who witnessed and admired his courage, and that of other freedom fighters behind the Iron Curtain such as Lech Walesa. He showed that men of principle and character truly can change the world* ([www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk))

### **3 Current position of the LibDems and its organisation**

#### **3.1 Party structure**

The Liberal Democrats is a federal party consisting of 3 parts - England, Scotland and Wales. Each country has its own representation on the head of the party. England and Scotland are also split into smaller deputyships, regions. Wales, because of its size, is just one unit.

Scotland has its own parliament, so the Scottish part of the party has also representation in the Scottish Parliament, as well as the Welsh part in the Welsh Assembly. In the Welsh Assembly the LibDems are at the edge, having just five seats out of sixty and being the weakest elected party. In Scotland the situation is similar - the Liberals have 5 seats but out of 129 so they are not the weakest party - there are also Independents and the Greens. Last elections were in both countries in May 2011.

The party wants also to be active and represented in Northern Ireland so they decided to co-operate with the Alliance party of Northern Ireland and support them in elections. There is also a separate party called Northern Ireland Liberal Democrats because it is supposed to have the potential to replace the Alliance and create a strong offshoot of the LibDems in Northern Ireland. Many Alliance members are also members of Northern Ireland Liberal Democrats.

Local and federal parties have different responsibilities:

*The Federal Party is responsible for the preparation of UK-wide policy, Parliamentary elections and fund-raising. England, Scotland and Wales separately are responsible for the operation of local parties, selection procedures for prospective parliamentary candidates, the arrangements for collecting and renewing Party memberships and policy matters relating specifically to their State - though they can request the Federal Party to look after the development of policy matters in particular fields*  
([www.libdems.org.uk](http://www.libdems.org.uk))

The Party takes pride in equality in everything. They do not differ gender, age, race or education. Every member has one vote in Leader or President elections. Everybody can stand for these positions and everybody can be elected. The most important position is leader and it means special rules for voting this position.

*A one-member, one-vote ballot of all members elects the Leader of the Party. Candidates in leadership election must be MPs. Nominations must be proposed and seconded by other MPs and supported by at least 200 Party members in not less than 20 Local Parties. Under normal circumstances, a leadership election must be held at least once in each Parliament. (www.libdems.org.uk)*

The party has also interesting layout of its members. You can find there a large number of women. The LibDems are the youngest out of three main political parties, a man could expect young people there, but the true is different.

*They are, as a party, almost as old as the Conservatives, with 35 per cent over the age of 65. Women form 47 per cent of party membership. Liberal Democrats are the most highly educated activists among the main parties: 42 per cent are graduates compare to 30 per cent (Labour) and 19 per cent (Conservative). A considerable majority (65 per cent) thinks of themselves as religious. (Ingle, 2008, p. 144)*

A single constituency is the smallest unit of the Liberal Democrats. Each constituency falls within the local party. Local parties create local organisations which are the highest agency in each country. Local organisations fall within the Federal party. Local parties are responsible for selecting

candidates to the Parliament and local governments. Local parties members also elect their representatives to the Federal conference, which meets at least twice a year and is a decision-making body of the party at Federal level. The Federal conference also elects members of three Federal Committees - Executive, Policy and Conference. Inner rules assure gender representation - there have to be at least  $\frac{1}{3}$  of both genders.

The Federal Executive is probably the most important out of these three committees. It is responsible for directing, co-ordinating and implementing the work of the Federal party. It is represented by a President who is elected each two years by all members of the party. The Policy committee is responsible for developing and creating law proposals and for organisation of general and European elections. The Conference committee is in charge of organising annual and unusual conferences and preparing of party agendas.

### **3. 2 The 2010 General election**

The 2010 General election was a breakthrough moment. For the first time since 1945 the LibDems MPs appeared on the Treasury front bench and had power. The party entered into a coalition with the Conservatives and felt a long awaited feeling of satisfaction, as Driver (2011) described:

*Liberals have spent the best part of seventy years waiting for something to happen - and in 2010 it did. Liberal Democrat MPs were on the government benches in the House of Commons, and Lib Dem ministers were sitting around the cabinet table of a coalition administration led by the Conservatives. Nick Clegg was deputy prime minister. The party had their hands on the levers of national power. (p. 127)*

However it could have been even better. The pre-election survey promised the LibDems up to 30 % share. The final number reached 23 %.

<b>Summary of opinion polls</b>				
	<b>Con %</b>	<b>Lab %</b>	<b>LD %</b>	<b>Others %</b>
Post - budget (25 - 29 March)	37	30	19	14
NI / C4 debate (29 March - 2 April)	38	30	20	12
After Easter (4 - 10 April)	39	30	19	12
Manifesto launches (10 - 15 April)	37	31	21	11
Post 1st leaders debate (15 - 22 April)	32	27	30	11
Post 2nd leaders debate (22 - 29 April)	34	27	29	10
Post 3rd leaders debate (29 April - 3 May)	35	27	28	10
Final polls (3 - 5 May)	36	28	27	10

Chart data are based on all published polls, conducted wholly or mostly between the dates: written in the table.

([www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk))

According to the table above, debates helped the LibDems to raise their preferences and especially around leaders debates they even defeated Labour. The reason for the boom was leader Nick Clegg; young and performed confidently and sympathetic. After 1st leaders debate the

LibDems reached 30 % and were on the top. However Clegg's star began to fade. He was not able to efface his opponents (David Cameron, Conservative, and Gordon Brown, Labour). After the final polls there seemed to be a battle for second place between the LibDems and Labour. However the Liberals lost almost 4% in finish and reached 5 less seats than in the 2005 general election.

The high percent of votes in polls might have been caused by floating voters. Many people who did not vote in 2005 chose the Liberal Democrats in polls because they saw there something new, something interesting. Experts also arrogate loss of votes to weak campaigning of the LibDems. The party reached 5 fewer seats than in the 2005 general election despite the fact they received almost 1 % more support than in the 2005 general election.. This is caused by the first-past-the-post system, which Quin and Clements (2011) explain:

*The Liberal Democrats have been penalised by first-by-the-post because what matters under this system is not simply obtaining a significant share of the vote in the right locations. Geographically-concentrated support is vital in single-member districts conducted under plurality rule. The two major parties have usually enjoyed such concentrated support. (p. 66)*

The situation in British politics was new and so all three parties wanted to achieve the best position. As Quin and Clements (2011) comments "*After five days of bargaining, first between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, and then, briefly, between the Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the logic of numbers prevailed.*" The Conservatives missed only about 20 seats to achieve a majority and it meant good ground for the LibDems. And as Curtice (2010) writes, David Cameron really wanted to become a prime minister so he was open to discuss.

*Mr. Cameron proved unexpectedly flexible on his attitude to the electoral system. His opening offer to the Liberal Democrats – of a commission on electoral reform – may have been obviously too little to form the basis of an agreement, but it signalled an appreciation of the importance of the issue to the Liberal Democrats. (Curtice, 2010, p 18)*

And so the negotiating between both parties could start.

### **3.3 Conservatives - Liberal Democrats coalition agreement**

Negotiating between the Conservatives and the Liberals took just five days and so both parties announced a Conservatives - Liberal Democrat coalition agreement, also called “The Coalition: Our Programme for Government.” It was for the first time since 1974 when one party did not reach an overall majority and the first coalition cabinet since the Second World War and Churchill’s war ministry. According to Allan and Bartle (2010):

*The United Kingdom thus acquired a new form of government. The country normally had a single - party government, elected on the basis of a manifesto placed before electors at the start of the election campaign. Now it had a coalition government with what amounted to a post - election manifesto, one that nobody had actually voted for. It was an era of new politics. (p. 251)*

The agreement, the seven-page document, was split into 11 sections - deficit reduction, spending review, tax measures, banking reform, immigration, political reform, pensions and welfare, education, relationship with the EU, civil liberties and environment. Each section described the aim of the new coalition in oncoming 5 years. This initial agreement was completed several



days later with domestic, foreign and defence policy. The cabinet consisted of 12 Conservatives and 5 Liberal Democrats.

Beside Nick Clegg's Deputy prime minister position the party controls Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate change, Secretary of State for Defence and because of the strong role in Scotland they achieved the position Secretary of State for Scotland.

## **4 Power of Liberal Democrats**

### **4.1 Point zero**

It is very hard to establish “point zero” of the Liberal Democrats. For some it would be 1989 and merger of the Liberals and the SDP. For some it would be 1981 and founding the SDP-Liberal Alliance. And for some maybe even earlier during 20th century when the Liberals literally tried to rise from the dead. According to the official beginning of the LibDems, “point zero” is the year 1989.

Early days of the Liberal Democrats were not easy at all. The party was merged in order to be more integrated and to have just one manifesto and reach greater support in elections. Previous fractionalism of the SDP-Liberal Alliance was not clear for voters and a large number of them were not sure what to think about this alliance. Instead of raising the number of members and voters new Liberal Democrats party started to lose its support. But it did not take a long time to get to winning way. The first general election in 1992 was a disaster for the LibDems who received just 3% of the seats. The same came in 1994 the European election where the LibDems received only 2.3% of the seats. However the party believed in their manifesto and their leader Paddy Ashdown and started to rise in the polls. In the 1997 general election and the 1999 European election it was not higher popularity of the party what helped to reach much better results but so-called first-past-the-post system. And this is one of the points in the LibDems manifesto - to create more righteous electing system. And so in 1997 general election the LibDems achieved one per cent less votes but more than doubled their seats and in 1999 European election the party lost almost six per cent of votes but changed previous two seats to current ten.

Charles Kennedy was the leader in two general elections during the era of Labour's Tony Blair. In the first one, 2001, Kennedy increased seats from 46 to 52 and in the second one, 2005, he achieved another ten to 62 seats and obtain the strong position of the political party number three. In the European elections the LibDems were always slightly weaker than in general elections.

Despite the fact Kennedy was the strong leader, the party finished fourth in the 2004 European election, losing to the Conservatives, Labour and also to the United Kingdom Independence party. On the other hand, both main parties, the Conservatives and Labour, lost 9 and 5.5 %, and the Liberals increased their support by over 2 %. The last leader, so far, is Nick Clegg whose first election as a leader was the 2009 European Parliament election. The situation diametrically changed - the Conservatives repeated their victory but in the previous election second Labour party lost almost 7 % and finished third. The LibDems did not take an advantage of this lost and finished fourth while the second place was achieved by the United Kingdom Independence Party. However, Clegg's shining moments were yet to come.

#### **4. 2 Crucial laws**

Under Clegg's leadership the LibDems stepped into the previously mentioned coalition with the Conservatives. Clegg has become the most successful leader so far. The Liberals became members of the government after seventy years so they want to use current power to assert their laws. There is a long list of laws and bills where the LibDems have participated but there are four, probably the most known and the most important for average people.

One of the biggest topics in politics in every country is pensions. The Liberals have always been caring about pensioners. The first state pension law was created by Lloyd George in 1908 as the Old-Age Pensions Act and promised 5 shillings (£0.25) a week for everyone over 70. In 2013 the LibDems created a law which raises the current £107.45 to £144. The law also takes into account inflation and so the pension will increase with increasing inflation. The LibDems also want to make the system easier. The current pension system has two state pensions: basic one, mentioned £107.45, and the additional pension based on past earnings. The system is quite complicated and the party would like to make it easier for the future. The law should also change a bad position of self-employers, carers or parents. As previously mentioned, the party has been equal in equality. So for

the first time men and women will be treated equally. The Liberal Democrats Pensions Minister Steve Webb described the law subsequently:

*The current state pension system is fiendishly complex, after seventy years of tinkering by successive governments, and Gordon Brown's strategy of means-testing has failed those pensioners it was designed to help most. We need a simple, single state pension, set above the basic means test, which enables everyone to work towards a decent income in retirement and encourages more peoples to save for their old age. (www.libdems.org.uk)*

The next important topic is equal marriage. This is again the global topic. In the United Kingdom, there was possible to enter into the civil partnership in 2005. But same-sex couples want to be equal with heterosexual couples and want regular marriage. The LibDems' feature of equality commands to the party to support same-sex couples. Nick Clegg supports many organisations or groups supporting same-sex marriages such as "Marriage without borders" or "the Coalition for equal marriage." "The coalition for equal marriage" was created in 2012 in response to "the Coalition of marriage" which was created by Christian group protestants who disagreed with equal marriage. Both groups have been fighting against each other, especially through web-site petitions, as Hill (2013) describes:

*The so-called Coalition for Marriage - made up predominantly of socially conservative religious groups - launched an online petition against same-sex marriage. In response, the Coalition for equal marriage - backed by human rights campaigners and progressive religious groups - launched a petition in favour of it. (p. 31)*

The LibDems also support creating new jobs. Since the general election in 2005 the party supported release of more than £1 billion as a Youth contract. This money have helped over 1 million young people to start an apprenticeship and stop being unemployed. This programme helps young people to work through apprenticeships, work placements or trainings and acquire new skills and to get a job. One of the reasons why the LibDems are categorised by some political scientists as the centre-right party is that they believe that creating new jobs help the economy and the whole country. This is connected with the LibDems' belief in investing money to create jobs and so they support investing in projects like building new houses, transport or improving of infrastructure. Through projects like those there have been created over 1 million jobs in private sector.

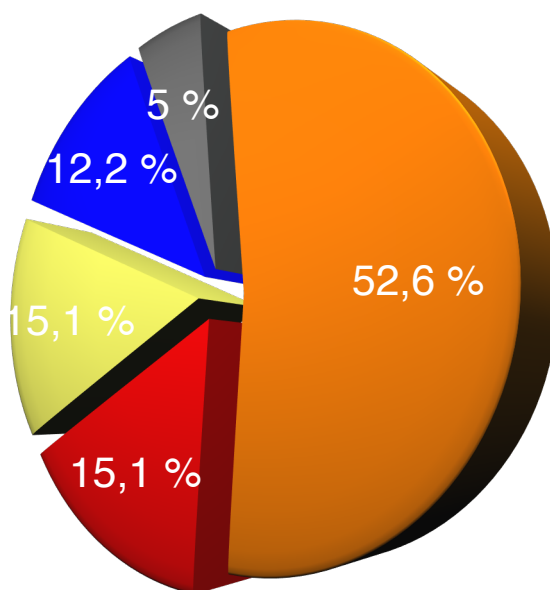
The Liberals also stood by so-called fairtax programme. The party wanted to enforce the law that helps people with lower incomes. The party wanted people with lower incomes to have lower income tax. The limit of this amount should been £700. In the co-operation with the Conservatives, the law, which was approved in December 2012, guarantees a tax abatement up to £600. This law came into the force in April 2013 and should help especially ordinary workers across the United Kingdom. On the other hand, there have been many critics of this law, such as Jennifer Wilson on the fairtax official websites: *"A family with one earner on £70,000 are now keeping only £47,563 yet a family with two earners each on £35,000 keep £7,000 more at £54,989. How can this be fair?"* Or Rodney Yates on the same page: *"All this is Very Bad News for people who rely on public services to eke out an existence in this society – the poor, the disabled, claimants, Seniors, Juniors."* (www.fairtaxes.org) This law became very controversial across the United Kingdom and in electing preferences the LibDems lost their support at the time of enforcement of this law. There is also another law, supported by the LibDems, which is in contradiction with £600 fairtax, and it is imposing annual tuition for education. So the LibDems on the one side save people money but on the other side people have to pay more.

#### 4. 3 Power in districts

In last two general elections in 2005 and 2010 the LibDems had always the biggest support in Scotland, referring to the appendices 2 and 3. The Liberal Democrats usually have the absolutely biggest support in Ross, Skye and Lochaber area. It is the largest parliament constituency area-wise in Britain. The face of the party here has been Charles Kennedy, the former leader. He won the 1997 general election with almost 39%, the 2001 general election with 54.1% majority, the 2005 general election with 54.3% majority and the last general election in 2010 he repeated his winning with 52.6% majority.

According to the chart below, the Conservatives placed fourth.

- |                     |              |                           |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| ● The LibDems       | ● The Labour | ● Scottish National party |
| ● The Conservatives | ● Other      |                           |



([www.politics.guardian.co.uk](http://www.politics.guardian.co.uk))

This is a quite unusual phenomenon in the UK - in the parliament constituencies where the LibDems are strong and usually winning party, the Conservatives placed mostly second. This is a case of below said parliament constituencies:

<b>P. constituency/the party</b>	<b>LibDems (%)</b>	<b>Conservatives (%)</b>
St. Ives	42.7	39
Truro and St. Austell	46.7	32.4
Cornwall North	48.1	41.7
Yeovil	55.7	32.9
Northavon	52.3	33.6
Lewes	52	36.7
Westmorland and Lonsdale	60	36.2

([www.politics.guardian.co.uk](http://www.politics.guardian.co.uk))

In all of these constituencies the LibDems won in the 2010 general election, usually with the majority and the Conservatives finished second. Even though Scotland has always meant the strongest support for the Liberals, Westmorland and Lonsdale became the most powerful ground for the LibDems in 2010. Tim Farron, as leader there, received 60 % and with another 36 % of the Conservatives, all other parties failed, especially Labour suffered a huge defeat with their 2.3% support there.

It is striking that the LibDems win in many Scottish constituencies in the UK general elections, but in the Scottish Parliament general elections they have not been able to win, as the table below confirms.

	<b>The Labour</b>	<b>The SNP</b>	<b>The Con</b>	<b>The LibDems</b>
<b>1999</b>	38.81	28.74	15.56	14.15
<b>2003</b>	34.6	23.8	16.6	15.3
<b>2007</b>	32.2	32.9	16.6	16.2
<b>2011</b>	31.69	45.39	13.91	7.93

([www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk))

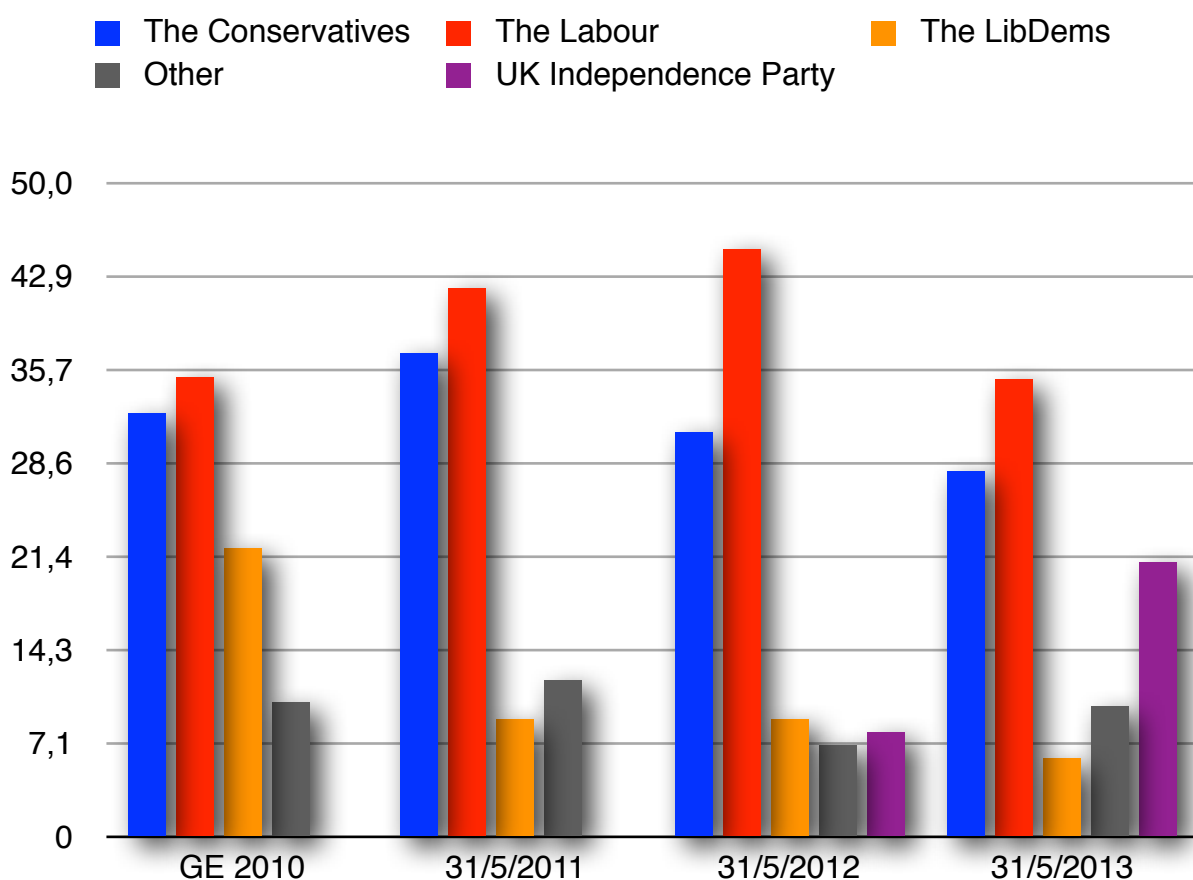
Not even they do not win, but in all Scottish Parliament general elections so far they have always finished fourth.



## 5 Plans for future

In the last general election in 2010 the LibDems achieved a historical success. They became a member of the government so planning for the future may be hard to define. The party has the young and energetic leader Nick Clegg. He is just 46 years old so he is able to be the leader for the next decade easily. However there have been many cases, such as the one from the Czech Republic, 2013, and the case of Petr Nečas, former czech prime minister who was also young and quite favourite but one mistake meant the end of his politics career.

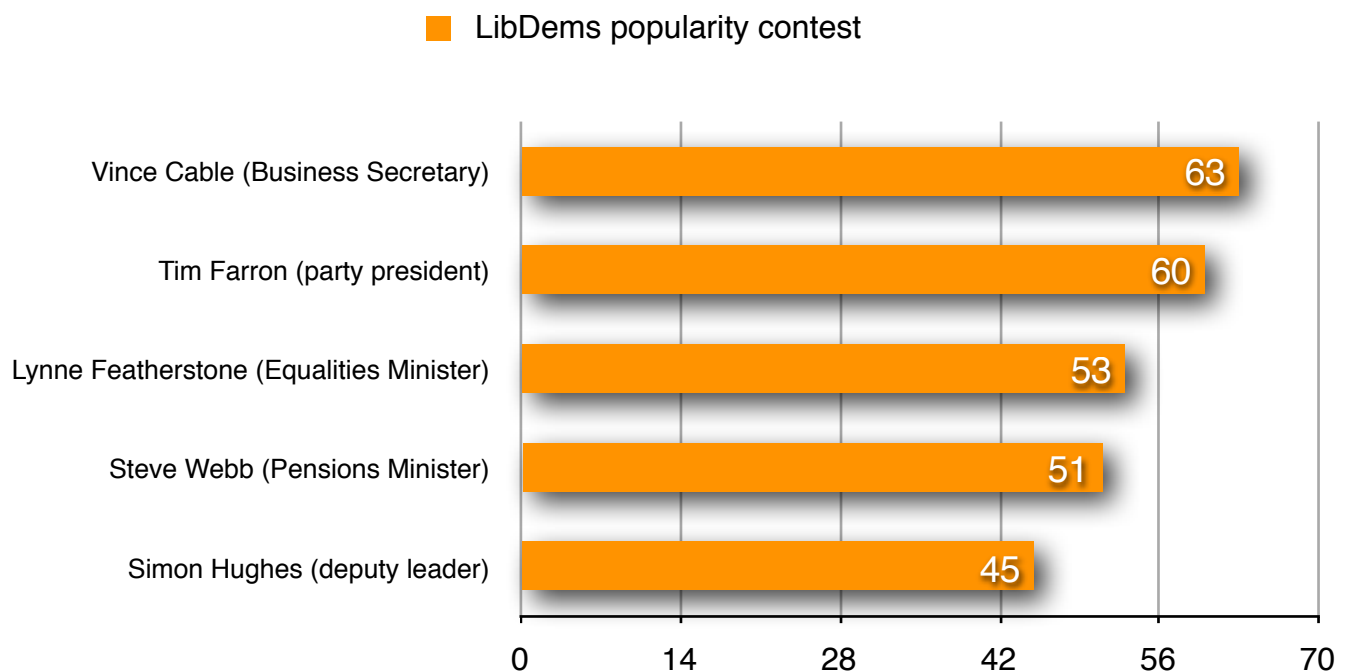
The LibDems would like to recharge the position they used to have at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries when they used to be the strongest party. But the reality will be probably different. Since the 2010 general election and the coalition with the Conservatives, the Liberals started to lose their support.



([www.ukpollingreport.co.uk](http://www.ukpollingreport.co.uk))

According to the chart above, in May this year, the LibDems would be elected by 6 % of voters. Especially the new UK Independence Party, which first appeared in the polls in April 2012, has been growing in popularity and it could be the third party in the future general election. This bad situation might endanger even leader Nick Clegg. As the YouGov warns, the Liberal Democrats could lose 80 per cent of their MPs in the next general election and so speculation about replacing Nick Clegg increase. Vince Cable, current Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, should be the successor ([www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), Ross). Ross also mentioned that the LibDems was not able to regain the support they lost immediately after agreeing the coalition with the Conservatives. Nick Clegg also loses his own support and “Cleggmania”, which ensured the party even the first position in several opinion polls before the 2010 general election, is gone.

This current unpopularity of Nick Clegg is declared also by The Independent and its research the LibDems members popularity.



([www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk))

The chart displays five the most popular Senior LibDems among the LibDems members. All members had to decide if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with them so in the extrem case some Senior LibDem could finished in negative numbers. In 2010 Nick Clegg was on the top of similar charts, but in 2012 when the chart was compiled, he was not in the TOP 5 and Vince Cable, previously mentioned possible successor, leaded this chart with his + 63 %. Clegg achieved + 32%, which is far away his + 60% he achieved in 2010. On the other hand he improved his result because a year earlier, in 2011, he achieved only + 17%.

Now, in 2013, one of four LibDems voters would vote the party again. And by the YouGov survey, this predicament may be even worse that the headline polling figures show. A quarter of those who supported Nick Clegg would vote Labour, a quarter other parties and a quarter do not know. And so the effort of the Liberal Democrats to “steal” voters to Labours has a contradictory result. On the other side, only 1% of voters have switched from Labour or the Conservatives to the LibDems. Political strategists say that the party will aim to “woo low to middle income families and women” ([www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)).

The LibDems had to expect that they would lose some voters by creating the coalition with the Conservatives because many Conservatives voters switched to the Liberals. These voters did want to vote neither the Conservatives nor the Labour Party. And so they are disappointed and do not believe the LibDems anymore. The Liberal Democrats have to solve their loss of the support. One of the possibilities is leaving the coalition and trying to get back some voters.

But the crisis do not have only the LibDems but also the coalition Conservatives. And so Heppel and Seawright (2012) suggest four ways to solve this crisis. First is mentioned leaving the coalition by the LibDems. Second, “the fragmentation of the coalition could involve leftward leaning Liberal Democrats abandoning the coalition, and for differing reasons, some right-wing Conservatives withdrawing their support” (p. 231). The third way is surviving all the problems and difficulties and the traditional electoral competition on 7 May 2015. And the last possibility is

deeper co-operation between both the LibDems and the Conservatives and their “mutually supporting electoral arrangement or a formal pact“ (p. 231).

However, these are just speculations and the next general election should be in 2015 and all parties have still enough time to prepare top election programme. The LibDems still have two years to gain lost ground so they have to change some things or attitude to reach their previous support. Some political scientists claim that the party do not follow their election programme and they are satisfied with being a part of the government so they just follow the Conservatives.

## **6. Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to describe historical development, power and future plans of the Liberal democrats, the party with a long history and place in the British politics. The party experienced many electory victory, especially at the beginning, but also many defeats. The 20th century was the hardest period of the party so far. It also seemed to be fall apart. However the alliance with the Social Democratic Party and later merge of both parties gave the Liberals new breath. The thesis also describes the most important people of the party and the most important laws which the LibDems have participated so far. I also tried to be critical in describing the laws and not only extol the work of the Liberals. I wanted to show future plans of the party but in this middle-election time, it is hard to describe plans and aims of the party. But it will not be easy because there has been growing new party, the UK Indepoendence party, which is described as libertarian democratic party, which forms it a big rival for the Liberal Democrats.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Cílem této práce bylo popsat historický vývoj, moc a budoucí plány Liberálních demokratů, strany s dlouhou historií a právoplatným místem v britské politice. Strana zaznamenala mnoho skvělých volebních vítězství, především na začátku svého vzniku, ale také mnoho nepříjemných porážek a neúspěchů. Dvacáté století bylo pro stranu velice těžké, dokonce to vypadalo na rozpad strany a její zánik. Avšak aliance se Sociálně demokratickou stranou a následné spojení obou politických stran vdechla Liberálům nové síly. Práce popisuje také nejdůležitější postavy Liberálů v celé historii a také rozebírá několik zásadních zákonů, na kterých se strana podílela. Snažil jsem se být také kritický a ve zmiňovaných zákonech najít i negativa, která přinačejí. Dalším tématem byla budoucnost strany, kterou je ovšem těžké v době mezi volbami popsat. Nicméně vzhledem k dalším generálním volbám v roce 2015 to nebudou mít Liberální demokraté vůbec jednoduché. Začíná se totiž ve Velké Británii rozrůstat nová strana, strana Nezávislých, která je popisována jako liberálně-demokratická, takže bude pro Liberální demokraty velkým soupeřem.

## APPENDIX



Appendix No. 1 - the official logo of the  
Liberal Democrats

Appendix No. 2 and 3 - map of the general election in 2005 (ap. 2) and 2010 (ap. 3)

